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ABSTRACT

Six students in a special education classroom at Levy Middle School (Syracuse, New York) became involved in a variety of after-school activities with nondisabled students. The students participated in the school computer club, cross-country skiing, volleyball, stage crew, intramural basketball, the Spanish Club, and after-school programs at two neighborhood centers. The project was developed jointly between the school district and Transitional Living Services, a local human service agency which provided funding and fulfilled state reporting requirements. The role of the special education teacher involved selecting activities, facilitating student participation in activities, setting goals, and developing activity modifications when necessary. Support staff were recruited, hired, and trained to assist the students with disabilities. The role of the support staff was to get to know the students; to offer individualized, flexible support; and to facilitate social interactions. Reactions of the activity leaders, of parents, and of nondisabled peers are included. (JDD)

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BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: INVOLVING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT LEVY MIDDLE SCHOOL

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BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: INVOLVING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT LEVY MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Introduction: A Vision of Inclusion

In 1975, the passage of Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, established the right for all children with disabilities to a "free and appropriate education" in the "least restrictive environment." In addition, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1983 promotes children's right to education in the least restrictive, or "most normal" setting possible. These laws have enabled many children and adolescents who were previously enrolled in segregated schools, for students with disabilities only, to attend neighborhood schools alongside their peers without disabilities.

While increasing numbers of students with disabilities are attending regular schools, their integration into school is often limited. Physical presence at a school does not necessarily achieve integration; integration also involves social interactions and relationships (Biklen, Lehr, Searl, & Taylor, 1987). In a review of exemplary practices which promote integration in schools, Taylor (1982) found one strategy to be involvement in social activities and organizations. An important part of school life, for all children, is the various social and recreational activities such as school clubs, teams, and other organizations. Participation in these types of activities gives students the opportunity to have fun together, work together on a team to achieve a common goal, meet new people and make friends, and build

and experience a sense of school spirit. Public law 94-142 extends to include children's participation in nonacademic and extracurricular activities. Hutchison and Lord (1979) point out, however, that integrated recreation and leisure opportunities have traditionally been given low priority as far as students with disabilities are concerned. Yet, this is a critical dimension of quality of life for all people, including those with disabilities (Ford et al., 1986; Hutchison & Lord, 1979). Oftentimes, however, students with disabilities have been excluded from these activities with nondisabled peers, even when they attend the same school.

The project described in this paper grew out of an interest in involving students with disabilities in school activities with nondisabled students beyond the classroom setting. It is based on a set of values and principles regarding people with disabilities and the supports they receive. Throughout their book on community integration for people with severe disabilities, Taylor, Biklen, and Knoll (1987) maintain that all people, including people with severe disabilities, belong in the community, and that supports should be provided which facilitate participation in the community. These principles are equally applicable within school settings. For the purposes of this project, some general principles include the following:

- All students, including those with the most severe disabilities, should have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities.

- Students should be offered whatever level of support they need in order to participate in these activities.

- The choices and preferences of students with disabilities and their families should be given priority in the selection of activities.

- Students should be involved in currently existing, age-appropriate school activities, rather than creating new, "special" ones which segregate students with disabilities.

This paper describes the ways in which the six students in one middle school special education classroom became involved in a variety of after-school activities, and what impact this involvement had on others. The students have labels ranging from moderate to severe mental retardation; all are labeled autistic; some have severe self-abusive behaviors; and some are nonverbal. Between January and June 1988, these students participated in the school computer club, cross country skiing, volleyball, stage crew, intramural basketball, the Spanish club, and after-school programs at two neighborhood centers.

The paper contains five sections. The first section provides background information, including a description of initial steps that were taken to get the project underway. Section 2 describes the role of the classroom teacher in arranging and facilitating student participation in activities, while the third section describes the role that support staff played in assisting students

with disabilities. Sections 4 and 5 present the perspectives of activity leaders, peers, and parents regarding student involvement in the extracurricular activities. These two sections are based on interviews and observations.

It is hoped that through the documentation of this project, we can accomplish two things: (1) offer ideas and strategies for similar efforts elsewhere and (2) convey a sense of the benefits for the school as a whole, when students with moderate and severe disabilities are included, rather than excluded, in the extracurricular aspects of school life.

Background to the Project

Beginnings: Laying the Groundwork

This project to involve students with disabilities in after-school activities took place during the 1987-88 school year at Levy Middle School in Syracuse, New York. It evolved in two ways. Chris Willis, a special education teacher at Levy, had already been making efforts and progress toward involving his students in integrated activities during the school day, but noticed their lack of involvement when the school day ended. He observed, "When the bell rang at the end of the day, other kids were going this way and that way, involved in different activities, but my students were just hopping on the bus and going home." Betsy Edinger, of Transitional Living Services, Inc. (TLS), a local human service agency, had been involved previously in using funding from "Family

Support Services," of New York State's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) to provide supports for children and teenagers at camps, neighborhood centers, and other community sites. Betsy's work emerged out of both the recognition of families' needs for respite, as well as a desire "to do more than just respite"--to simultaneously facilitate the involvement of children and teens in their neighborhoods and communities. She recognized that the increased involvement of students with disabilities in schools was another need that could be addressed through use of OMRDD respite funds.

Betsy and Chris met and worked out a plan to pay one of the teacher's assistants in Chris's classroom to provide support to one of his students, Tasha, so that she could join the school volleyball team. Because this was such a positive experience, Betsy wrote a grant to obtain additional state funding to pay for supports that would enable more of Chris' students could take part in after-school activities.

Agreement between the School and TLS

Once grant funds were obtained, Betsy and Chris drew up a proposal describing the responsibilities of Levy Middle School and Transitional Living Services. School personnel would be responsible for program implementation (see Section I: Role of the Teacher), and for completing quarterly reports. The school would accept liability for on-grounds activities (as it does for all other students who participate in extracurricular activities at school), and obtain waivers of liability from parents for off-

grounds activities. Transitional Living Services would provide the funding and fulfill state reporting requirements, thereby significantly reducing the burden of paperwork for the school. TLS also planned to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. The proposal was presented to the school itself as well as the Syracuse City School District in the form of a written agreement. After some deliberation between school- and district-level officials, it was decided that Transitional Living Services and the school district would enter into the agreement. The agreement ran from January 1 through December 31, 1988.

There were both advantages and disadvantages to this arrangement. A major advantage was that the program was located within the school district system, rather than an outside human services agency. This could lay the groundwork for similar efforts at other schools within the district. The primary disadvantage involved having to make administrative arrangements at a higher organizational level, the district, rather than through the school itself, where programmatic decisions were implemented.

Role of the Classroom Teacher

The role of the classroom teacher involved overall coordination of student involvement in extracurricular activities. This entailed a number of different components, including: (1) helping students select activities to be involved in; (2) gaining entry for students into activities; (3) developing written goals

and activity modifications for each student; (4) recruiting support staff; (5) hiring and paying support staff; (6) training and supervising staff; and (7) maintaining contact with staff responsible for the activity (e.g., coaches, club leaders, director of the school play).

Selection of Activities

There were three major factors that were taken into consideration for the selection of activities.

1. Students with disabilities should be involved in the selection of activities in which to participate, rather than having teachers and/or families make decisions without their input. Student interest and preference should be taken into account. Within a school setting, leisure is one of the areas about which students should have the most choice (Ford et al., 1984; Voeltz, Wuerch, & Wilcox, 1982).

2. The teacher should consult with parents regarding their ideas and preferences for how and in what activities their son or daughter might participate. Ford et al. (1984) and Voeltz et al. (1982) specifically emphasize the importance of gaining parental input and involving parents in the decision-making about leisure activities.

3. It is preferable that students be dispersed into different activities at different times throughout the year, for two reasons. First, it is important to avoid clustering of a number of students with disabilities in the same activity, since the goal of integration may be compromised in such a situation. Second, supervision and coordination of student involvement is time consuming. It would have been virtually impossible for the one classroom teacher to adequately supervise all six of the students in six different extracurricular activities at the same time. In this project, there was never more than one student involved in a particular activity. We believe this greatly enhanced the social acceptance of the student, and would recommend this as a guideline for others to follow.

In retrospect, we might add one other factor in the selection of activities. We would seek the opinions of peers who know the student with disabilities. Peers often have ideas that would provide valuable input into the selection process.

Gaining Entry

There were a number of factors which helped facilitate the participation of Chris' students in extracurricular activities. He used both some general strategies, as well as some specific strategies that varied from one activity to another, depending upon the situation. This section begins by outlining the general approach and then gives more specific examples.

First, Chris made a point of getting to know the various staff responsible for clubs and teams within the school. An important strategy to promote integration of students with disabilities is through the teacher's connection to other staff within the school (Biklen, 1986; Taylor, 1982). For Chris, the connections and relationships that he had developed with other school staff members were important to the involvement of his students in school activities. Second, Chris made it clear that his students would be given support, and that support staff persons would assist with the club or team activities. In this way, the support person contributed to the entire activity, in addition to providing support for the student with disabilities. Third, joint planning of goals, modifications, and activities took place with the activity leader to determine in what ways the student would participate. Fourth, Chris modeled interventions and social interactions for the activity leaders. In order to facilitate integration, an important role for the teacher is to provide such modeling (Biklen, 1986). In this way, others can observe and learn specific strategies for working with the particular student with disabilities.

In the following paragraphs, Chris describes how some students became involved in various activities.

Spanish Club. Ben was involved in the Spanish Club. One of the projects, at Halloween, was to make the school into a haunted house. The club members had to build and paint props. Ben enjoys painting and building

things with wood, and is very able to do these activities with occasional direction from peers or adults. I explained this to the club moderator. She was open to having Ben participate because she knew him from the school day. She was also interested in my input about the project.

Ben helped paint large murals, build props, and set up. He also had the opportunity to "hang out" with the other students and join them in a few club pizza parties.

During the course of Ben's involvement with the Spanish Club, I helped him to be part of various activity groups already in progress; initiated a project, then involved several students with Ben; and let students get Ben involved on their own initiative. All three strategies were successful at different times.

Volleyball. I coached the volleyball team myself. One of my classroom staff members assisted Tasha in the locker room, and drove her home daily after practice. Tasha participated in activities and drills with her teammates. She played for at least some time in all games.

This activity was perhaps the easiest to gain entry into since I, as the coach, had a major influence on what happened. I could design and model ways to include Tasha. I feel that coaching one of the activities my students were involved in had benefits which extended beyond this particular activity. I could demonstrate to

other coaches and club leaders that a student with disabilities could successfully be part of a team. Coaching also redefined my role with other students at the school. I developed a direct relationship and involvement with them, not just with the students with disabilities. Some of the relationships I developed with these students carried over to other situations and facilitated the process of integrating my students into different activities.

Basketball. Early in the year, I asked the basketball coach if Gary could play on an intramural team. He was very responsive to the idea. We discussed what the expectations of Gary would be and the support he would require. I told him a support person would be hired to assist Gary.

Gary was a pretty good basketball player, but lacked some fundamental skills. Both the support person and the coach taught Gary some skills during drills. The coach was less strict about calling penalties on Gary such as walking and double dribbling. The support person assisted the coach in refereeing the games and both of them provided direction to Mike, as needed, on the court. Because Gary's support person was quite skilled at basketball, she was a contributor to the general running of the activity as well as to the development of skills with all of the players. I think the fact that she could fit so easily into the activity was reflected

in the way Gary was able to become an active member himself.

Stage Crew. This was an activity in which I had to compromise the short term goal, Jason's involvement in the actual production of the play, for the long term goal, which was participation in this afterschool activity for the years Jason is at our school.

The director of the play was a teacher with whom I had not worked very often, and the backstage supervisor was the art teacher, who regularly involved my students in his art classes.

I met with the director on several occasions prior to the start of rehearsals for the play. Jason was interested in working on the lighting crew, and I was hoping he could take part in this aspect of the play. At first, the director seemed open to Jason's involvement in this way. However, once rehearsals started, she told me to discuss the matter with the backstage supervisor. (The backstage supervisor felt Jason wouldn't be able to handle the complexity of the job the lighting crew would do, even with support and modifications.) He had always been enthusiastic about having Jason in his class, but didn't seem to want him involved with the play. At our school, the annual play has a tradition of excellent performances. I wondered about the pressure on the staff to live up to this reputation and the effect this had on their willingness to include Jason. Rather than push

hard for Jason's involvement on the lighting crew, I decided to compromise for now. So, I went back to the director and we agreed that Jason would work in the concession stand during the play and help pass out programs. In doing this, I was hoping Jason's contribution this year could be a first step toward more involvement next year; it would be something we could build on.

Cross-Country Ski Club/Gymnastics/Track and Field/Computer Club. For these activities, the process of gaining entry for my students was generally similar. First, I asked the staff member if my student could participate. I explained that a support person would be there to assist the student. We talked about ways the student could participate, including possible activity modifications and types of support that would be needed. For both cross-country skiing and track, I offered my support also. Since the ski club needed drivers to transport students, I offered to drive Ben and three other students. In track, I participated with Jason, running alongside him during the meets. Also, I assisted the coach with drills for the whole team and officiated at some of the meets.

Chris was successful in gaining entry into the various activities because he had developed a variety of strategies, and used them in a ways that responded to specific situations. Sometimes he had to compromise his ideas, as with Jason's participation in the school play, to gain entry into the activity. Many times he simply had to ask if a student could belong to a club or be part of a team. In all of the activities, the activity leaders or coaches said that knowing they would have support was an important consideration in having a student with disabilities participate in their club or on their team. As activity leaders and members get to know a student, there may come a time when a support person is not necessary. However, planning for support greatly contributes to gaining entry into an activity for the first time.

Goals and Activity Modifications

Goals. Prior to beginning an activity, a set of both task-related and social goals was developed for each student. The objectives were designed to directly facilitate participation in the specific activity. The following example illustrates the task and social goals developed for Tasha in gymnastics.

Task/Activity Goals

- Student will learn one gymnastic routine.
- Student will practice routine daily.
- Student will perform routine independently at interscholastic meets.

- Student will warm up with nondisabled peers.

Social Goals

- Student will assist nondisabled students with setting up apparatus.
- Student will accept assistance from nondisabled peers.
- Student will say "hello" to peers daily given prompts.

Goals were established in order to provide a general framework for assisting a student. They were meant to be flexible--to be slightly altered or completely revised once the activity had begun depending on the needs of the individual student with disabilities as well as the group as a whole (e.g., the volleyball team, the Spanish Club, etc.). For example, when Tasha began gymnastics, it was discovered that the routine that had been worked out for her was too difficult; the routine was changed so Tasha could experience some success. She performed her routine at gymnastics meets; however, her score was not considered as part of the team's total.

The goals created one vehicle by which students with disabilities could increase their skills and enhance their participation and interaction. Sandy, who assisted Gary in intramural basketball, noticed that as Gary's skills increased he was a more enthusiastic participant. At the same time, not all students will necessarily make significant gains in skills, especially during the relatively short duration of an activity

(i.e., 8 weeks, at most). Hence, it is important to recognize and encourage even the smallest successes.

While the goals and objectives serve a certain purpose, it is important, overall, not to put too much emphasis on this aspect of student involvement. With a narrow focus on specific goals, it is all too easy to overlook other important components of involvement, such as: the various rituals that occur before, during and after an activity; time for just "hanging out" with other students; or learning things that other students define as important. Examples from basketball can be used to illustrate these three points. Initially, Gary would get upset and sometimes leave if he didn't get to play right away. The coach observed, "I think Gary didn't understand what was going on as far as we played two games a nigh[illegible]metimes his game wouldn't be til three and I think he would come down at 2:30 and think that he should be playing. And even though we tried to explain that to him, I don't think he really understood at first." By about the fifth or sixth session, though, Gary had learned the routine and no longer became upset if a game was in progress and he was not included. Also, it was important for Gary to have the opportunity to "hang out" with the other players, even if he was not overtly interacting with them. Mike's support person noted an incident when acceptance by his teammates seemed to take a big leap forward. It had nothing to do with basketball; they were "horsing around" in the hall, "just being boys." After that, Gary's teammates would seek him out on the sidelines while waiting for their turn to play. Finally, the

basketball coach noted that Gary became "part of the team" and "he even started to learn how to complain to the referees."

As previously noted, the formal goals have their place--they help us understand some of the key ways in which a student will participate in a particular activity. But, goals cannot be written for "becoming part of the team" or "having a good time." It is important to keep goals and objectives in the proper perspective.

Activity modifications. In order for students with disabilities to participate in activities, especially students with more severe disabilities, it may be necessary to develop modifications to the typical activities and routines. Some examples are provided below.

Volleyball: Tasha

Activity	Modifications
stretch	does independently
run length of gym	does independently
practice serving	peer holds ball while Tasha hits with fist
bump ball	throws ball up during practice
set ball	same as above
rotate on court	peer's physical prompt

sit with group	does independently
game day	play game for 3-4 serves
sit on bus with peers	does independently

Cross Country Skiing: Ben

Activity	Modifications
get skis	verbal, physical prompts
put on clothes and equipment	as above
ski 1 1/2 hours	ski for 45 minutes
take off equipment and skis	verbal, physical prompts
sit next to fireplace with peers	make sure Ben sits in close proximity to other students

It is important to note that the modifications were developed on an individualized basis, according to the particular students' needs. Modifications were flexible, and could be altered or changed as needed during the course of an activity. For example, originally, Ben was scheduled to ski for a full 2 hours. However, when he did this, he missed out on sitting around in the lodge after skiing with the other club members. So, the goal was changed to 45 minutes of skiing, thereby allowing him time for some social interaction with the other students afterwards.

Recruitment of Support Staff

Recruitment of support staff requires a significant amount of the classroom teacher's time and effort. Chris' initial plan was to post "Help Wanted" signs and then interview and select qualified persons. However, only one person responded to the notices, which were placed at local colleges and universities. Most of the people who were interested in working came from academic environments, though not in response to the ads; rather, they were either people that Chris knew, friends of friends, or paraprofessionals within Levy Middle School.

Although the most effective strategy for recruitment was by word-of-mouth, at the same time, it is advisable not to rely solely on this strategy, but to simultaneously pursue a few or several recruitment strategies. Some of these are listed below:

- placing notices at local colleges and universities, in staff rooms within the school itself, as well as other locations throughout the community

- placing ads in the newsletters of schools, human service agencies, or the general community newspaper

- contacting employment agencies and volunteer centers

- speaking in university classes or contacting teachers of university students

- encouraging classroom assistants, aides, and other staff who already know the students with disabilities to participate as support personnel

- talking about the project and the need for help to friends, colleagues, etc.

- developing and maintaining a broad range of connections--within the school, with universities, human service agencies, and the community at large.

Hiring and Payment of Staff

Hiring. Support staff were hired based on personal interviews. Some of those hired were aides from the special education classroom who were interested in a few extra hours of work; others were hired from outside the school (e.g., students from local colleges and universities). They were hired for each activity--to work with one particular student for the duration of that activity (ranging from about 6-8 weeks). There were a number of advantages to hiring people on an activity-by-activity basis:

1. It was possible to match the interests of the support person to the particular activity. For example, the person who assisted Gary in basketball knew the rules of the game and could also help coach other students and referee some of the games. The person who assisted Jason during track enjoyed track himself.

2. Different school activities vary in terms of their schedule and duration. Some occur at the same time or overlapping time periods. Hiring a person for one activity gives that person a more predictable schedule and routine, and eliminates the possibility of having to be in two different places at the same time.

3. Hiring by activity afforded greater flexibility to match the person offering support to the needs and preferences of the student.

4. The short-term nature of the commitment attracted some people, particularly the college students, many of whom would not have been able to make a longer-term commitment.

5. Staff were originally hired as short-term "consultants." This avoided some of the administrative problems which would have occurred if they had been hired as employees, including more extensive paperwork. This arrangement offered the possibility of paying some individuals at a higher rate than others under certain circumstances, for example, paying more to a person with more experience who requires little or no supervision or to a person supporting a student with more needs.

The major disadvantage to hiring by activity is the need for constant recruitment and training. The experience gained by a support staff member in one activity is not necessarily carried over to other activities (unless that staff person happens to be hired for another activity).

Payment. Project grant funds were used to pay support staff rather that recruit volunteers. Chris' past experience had been that volunteers were difficult to recruit, and there was frequently a lack of dependability. Payment seemed to be an incentive, although not the only one. Many of the support staff either wanted experience working with the students with disabilities, or simply enjoyed working with them.

The number of hours that each person worked was flexible, depending upon the activity. Our original idea was to pay support staff an average of $5 an hour; they would receive their pay in one lump sum at the conclusion of an activity. However, due to school district policy and procedures, support staff were paid in two different ways. One method was for support staff who were already on the district payroll (e.g., teacher assistants). They filled out time cards and were reimbursed according to the hourly wage they currently received. Staff benefit costs, such as disability and unemployment insurance, were also charged to the project. This expense was not anticipated at the start of the project. The arrangement also did not allow for the flexibility a "consultant" agreement (versus employee relationship) would provide. Support staff hired from outsie the school were hired as consultants, requiring a different set of paperwork than that which was used for

current employees. However, this did allow for the flexibility and rate of pay originally intended.

In retrospect, we would recommend a meeting of those responsible for administering the project (in this case, someone from the district) and those implementing the project (the teacher) at the beginning of the project. At this time, it would be important to discuss the needs of both parties and establish clear lines of communication.

Training and Supervision of Support Staff

The amount of training and supervision provided to support staff varied, depending on their needs and those of the student with whom they would be working. Chris familiarized all staff with the skill and social goals that he had developed for each student. On an on-going basis, he met individually with support staff; he also observed them from time to time to give them feedback.

An advantage to hiring classroom assistants was that they already knew the students, and therefore were familiar with students' likes/dislikes, as well as some individualized strategies for working with them. However, for a classroom assistant, the experience of working with a student in a integrated recreational activity can be very different from the daily classroom contact. If classroom personnel participated, the training consisted of an orientation to the "support" role and in what ways this is different from their typical classroom role vis-a-vis the student. Supervision entailed weekly meetings with the teacher.

Training and supervision of support staff from outside the school required more time and effort. Prior to the beginning of the activity, they were encouraged to come observe the student, spend some time getting to know the student, and meet other school personnel. Once the activity began, Chris spent time with the support person during the activity, modeling interactions and strategies for assisting the student and answering questions. For one support person, Melanie, it was important to have some time to observe Chris, the classroom teacher, working with Ben before she was left on her own to do so. Melanie recalled, "The first day with Ben created some sort of anxiety. Having Chris Willis there was a great help. I had to watch every little thing that was done with Ben. I had to learn the type of approach that was used when talking to him, when getting him ready to skiing, and when actually skiing." In spite of this orientation, many of the support staff hired from outside the school still reported initial anxiety over not knowing the student and not knowing how to assist him or her. One support person reported that she was nervous at first because "I didn't know if he would get angry or if he would become physically aggressive." Another commented, "I think the problem has been that I was not providing the kind of encouragement Gary was needing." They had to develop strategies during the course of the activity. Project staff recognized that it takes time to get to know students. Over time, these support staff were adept at getting to know the students and finding ways to assist them.

Even though they didn't know the students to begin with, there are certain advantages to hiring support staff from outside the school. They may have certain skills, such as a knowledge of basketball, which are more useful for assisting students to participate than "disability-related" skills. Also, it may be easier for them to relate to the student in a "support" role rather than a teacher-oriented one.

In summary, an important lesson was that it is not necessary to hire only special education teachers, or even people from within the human services field, to assist the students. Schleien and Ray (1988) advocate the use of "generalists" rather than "specialists," and the importance of de-emphasizing the need for specially trained staff and special programs to facilitate integrated recreation. Rather, what is needed is that the person providing support get to know the student and, based on this, learn how best to give assistance. In general, support staff who were hired from outside the school reported some initial anxiety, but after some time working with the student had begun to develop a relationship with that student and had learned some effective ways to provide support. This type of familiarity and knowledge of the student cannot be transmitted only through meetings with the teacher; it must be gained through direct experience with the student. In future years, efforts will be made to build in more time for support staff to get to know the students they are working with prior to the beginning of an activity, and to prepare them ahead of time to expect some feelings of uncertainty and realize that many of their questions will be answered along the way.

Contact with Other Staff

An important part of the role of the classroom teacher was contact with staff who were involved in school clubs, teams, and other organizations. The teacher's contact with activity leaders is one that begins before students are involved in activities and continues throughout the duration of that activity and beyond.

As noted previously, gaining entry into activities was facilitated by Chris' knowledge of and connections with other school staff members. Prior to the beginning of an activity, the teacher and the activity leader met to discuss and come to an agreement about what type of support the student would need, how it would be provided, and what, if any, other adaptations or modifications might be needed. Once the activity began, Chris initiated informal contact with the staff member. In this way, he could answer questions or help problem solve if the need arose.

Even if a staff member never has specific questions or problems, it can be reassuring just to know that the teacher is willing to assist, or is interested in his or her input about how things are working out. This can prevent activity leaders from feeling as though they have had students "dumped" on them.

It was important that contact with staff also included both a recognition of their efforts at inclusion of students with disabilities as well as assistance, where needed, in their role vis-a-vis the student with disabilities. This recognition helped develop and nurture both a commitment to including students with disabilities, as well as knowledge of how to do it in a way that maximizes opportunities for interaction.

Summary: Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher in getting students involved in extracurricular activities entails a significant effort, with many different tasks to be done. This will be most difficult the first year, both working out administrative arrangements and getting people to try something new--that is, including students with special needs where they have never been included before. After the first year, there probably will still be a lot of on-going work needed, but much of the groundwork should be in place for further integration. Where funds are available, it is recommended that the teacher build in sufficient compensation for him- or herself for this effort. Above all, though, the initial motivation will come from a commitment to having one's students participate in all aspects of school life. Based upon the experience at Levy Middle School, on-going motivation will be fueled by the interactions and membership that takes place when students have these opportunities.

Role of the Support Staff

This section describes some of the key components of the role played by support staff in assisting students to participate in the extracurricular activities at Levy Middle School. It begins with discussion of the initial and most crucial element of effective support, "Getting to Know the Student." A second part describes a critical feature of support, that is, the use of individualized

strategies for support. Following this are some examples of specific strategies that were used. The next part of the section describes an important part of the support role, "Facilitating Interactions." The last part of this section is a discussion of "Lessons Learned." These lessons pertain both to ways of assisting students to participate and interact with others, as well as some findings about characteristics of "support staff" and the types of supports needed by support staff themselves.

Getting to Know the Student

This is a first and most important step in the process of providing supports. As previously noted, the individuals recruited from outside of the school were at somewhat of a disadvantage, since they started working with the student without knowing the student very well. Initially, these individuals experienced some anxiety about not knowing the student. Melanie, who assisted Ben with cross country skiing, said she was uncomfortable at first "because I didn't know how to deal with some of the things Ben did. I didn't know how to motivate him." She felt that more interaction with Chris, Ben's teacher, would have been helpful. In gymnastics, Colleen also felt it would have been helpful to know more about Tasha, such as some of the ways she behaved, how she communicated, and how to assist her before the beginning of the activity.

However, as the support staff became acquainted with the student, they became increasingly comfortable, and were better able to develop strategies for assistance. After a few weeks, Melanie

reported, "We had a lot of fun. I have learned how to get Ben to ski on his own." Another example is provided by, Sandy, who assisted Gary to participate in intramural basketball. A few weeks into this activity, she reflected, "I think the problem has been that I was not providing the kind of encouragement Gary was needing. I realize now that I need to be much more vocal and show him he's doing a good job. I did that somewhat today and he responded tremendously." And, Brenda, who provided support for Bobby in the Computer Club, commented, "I feel knowing Bobby, knowing Bobby's abilities, knowing how he works, helped me work with him."

"Getting to know the student" is important not only for the sake of the person providing assistance, but also for the student. The staff members who provided support in basketball and gymnastics reported noticeable changes in their abilities to assist the student when the student felt comfortable with them.

It is important to see support as occurring within the context of a relationship. Time should be built in for developing familiarity, both before an activity begins and during the course of that extracurricular activity.

Individualized, Flexible Supports

As they grow to understand the student with disabilities, support staff are more able to develop a range of individualized types of support for that person--based upon his or her specific needs. After a short time working with Tasha, the support person discovered, "I realized that if I tried to get too close to Tasha,

she would back away. So I stood off to the side and watched her. When she seemed lost (stood alone in the middle of the gym), I tried to get her to join in with the rest of the girls." The staff member also discovered things that Tasha liked: "Tasha loves jumping rope." For Ben, the support staff member reported, "I found Ben requires a fairly calm voice...You really have to prompt Ben to doing things..."

Most important is the fact that each student will need different types and levels of support; the strategies for support are not identical from one student to the next. It is also important to be flexible and open to changing the types and amounts of support provided to a given students. It is through spending time with that student and trying different techniques that the support person can learn which ones are most effective. And, to reiterate a previous point, it is essential that support staff are told at the beginning that it takes time to figure out which support strategies are most effective for a given student. It is a process; they will learn as they go and will, most likely, discover some very effective strategies of their own.

Specific Strategies for Support

Some examples of specific strategies of support that were used to assist students during extracurricular activities are described below.

Prompting. Sometimes students may require different levels of prompting (verbal, physical) in order to participate. For Mike, the support person found that at first he needed prompting to go

join his teammates for warm-up and on the sidelines. After a few weeks, however, he reported that Gary no longer needed this prompting. Also, other students can be equally if not more effective in prompting students to participate. During cross country skiing, Melanie observed, "Cathy (another member of the club) skiied with Ben and me the rest of the way back to the building. She was very good at coaxing Ben along."

Modeling. To help Tasha learn the gymnastics routine, Colleen describes, "I learned the routine and showed it to Tasha step-by-step, asking her to imitate me. When she did do the routine I applauded her efforts." Modeling need not involve the support staff member only, but can also be provided by other students, sometimes more effectively. For example, at times, Tasha was more likely to pay attention to what the other students were doing than what Colleen was doing. Colleen reported, "Annette (another student) helped Tasha a lot...Tasha obviously knew her, and if I couldn't get Tasha to do something, Annette would come over and show her the routine and Tasha would follow."

Teaching needed skills. Research has found that students with moderate and severe disabilities typically have very limited leisure skill repertoires (Ford et al., 1986). Acquisition of skills related to an activity can facilitate greater participation and interaction. For example, in basketball, Gary's teammates responded enthusiastically to his good plays. Gary, in turn, was very encouraged by the praise he received.

It is important to recognize the need for students to acquire "skills" or learn behaviors that are more indirectly associated with an activity. For Tasha, in gymnastics, this meant learning to sit and watch others take their turn and clap and cheer for them. For Mike, in basketball, it meant learning to join in fun with teammates before the game, to sit with the team on the sidelines rather than with the support person during the game, to join the huddle, and to take part in the team celebration after a victory. These types of skills are equally as important as other skills which are more directly related to participation.

Adaptation of activities. It is also important to be open to revision or adaptation of activities in order to enable a person with disabilities to participate. These adaptations should be made on an individualized basis (Ford et al., 1984; Schelein & Ray, 1980). For instance, it soon become apparent that the gymnastics routine planned for Tasha was too difficult; instead of continuing to work on a task in which the likelihood of success was minimal, a new routine was developed. In cross country skiing, Melanie was at first discouraged at "not being able to get Ben to participate for as long as I had hoped." She had to revise her expectations for the amount of time she would encourage Ben to ski.

Partial participation. Using a strategy of "partial participation" enables even students with the most severe impairments to take part in a wide range of activities. It involves assisting the student to participate in at least a part of an activity, even if he or she is not able to participate in all aspects (Baumgart et al., 1979). During volleyball, Tasha

participated on the court for very short periods of time; afterwards she returned to the sidelines and sat with her teammates. The way that Tasha's participation was designed balanced both her need to play as well as the desires of her teammates to win. The exact nature of her participation was flexible, and could change depending on the team situation. While Tasha would play whether the team was winning or losing, the amount of time that she played varied, depending on the team situation.

Praise/encouragement. Support staff learned about the importance of praise and encouragement. Working with Gary at basketball, Sandy talks about learning to give Gary a lot of praise for his efforts. "I really speak and encourage Gary a lot and he responds so much better..." Skiing with Ben, Melanie reflected, "He took it upon himself to go down the first little slope himself and with my praise and encouragement he continued to ski on his own. So today I have learned how to get Ben to ski on his own." While some students demonstrate significant increase and improvement in their participation, the achievements of others may be much less noticeable. It is important to praise even the smallest of achievements.

Giving students time to learn. It takes varying amounts of time for all students, not only those with disabilities, to learn to participate in activities. This includes not only the central activity (i.e., playing basketball), but the other routines and activities that surround it, such as using the locker room, warming up, and sitting on the sidelines. Support staff members reported noticeable improvements, over time, in the students' skills, as

well as their adjustment to the related activities and routines. The support person for Mike commented, "There is a definite noticeable difference in Gary's participation. Gary started the game today and played for the first 6 minutes and then returned with 3 minutes left to play. He ran up and down the court, stayed with his man today and even stole the ball once." Sandy who assisted Gary at basketball, reflected, "I watched him go from a frustrated participant to a happy, eager player."

Backing-off from oversupport. It is important to be conscious of when a student needs a lot of direct support and when to back off and either let other students or teachers provide support or let the student participate independently. For example, working with Bobby in the Computer Club, the support person reported, "He told me to get lost...He wanted to do it on his own." During cross country skiing, Ben rarely interacted with other people, and needed a lot of assistance and encouragement to participate. When a situation arose in which Ben approached another person, or someone approached him, Melanie said that she "didn't interrupt," but rather let the interaction take place on its own. And, in basketball, the coach reflected that neither he nor the support staff member had to do much; it was primarily the other students who facilitated the involvement of Gary on the team.

Backing-off does not mean doing nothing; rather, it is a different form of support, done with a continued awareness and consciousness of how the student is participating in the activity and what types of interactions he or she is involved in. While it is possible with some students to back off, other students will

consistently require direct support. Knowing when to back off, and when not to, is an important component of the support role; it must be determined on an individual basis with each student.

Learning to communicate. Efforts by support staff to improve communication with the student were helpful in facilitating both the relationship between them as well as the student's participation in the activity. A support person was learning sign language to increase her communication with Tasha, who uses very limited verbal communication. Another support person recalled, "I found Ben requires a fairly calm voice..." As a result, Ben was more responsive to her and interaction was increased.

Treating people "just like everyone else". The emphasis of support should be to minimize distinctions and treat the student as the other students are treated (Ford et al., 1984; Schelein & Ray, 1988). For instance, the support person for Tasha in gymnastics commented, "She wouldn't want to be taken aside and treated as special. She likes to be treated just like everyone else." In basketball, the coach commented, I just thought you should treat him normal anyways. I mean if you go out of your way to make any kind of special considerations for him, then everyone's going to notice him. If he fouled, then we called a foul. He was expected to play like everyone else. We didn't have any problems with it, so that's the way I like to do it...It worked out well, I thought."

Typically, using common sense is a major step toward figuring out how to assist students with disabilities, as it is for students who are nondisabled also. The person who assisted Bobby in the Computer Club commented, "I just used all of my common sense

knowledge. That's all. I've used a lot of my common sense and it has worked out very well. What you generally know about kids holds true for these kids. They're really no different. O.K., there are some differences as far as functioning goes, but they're like any other kid, if you think about it."

Facilitating Interactions

Strully and Strully (1986) emphasize the importance of friendships for all people, including those with severe and multiple disabilities. They underscore the need for integration to include social rather than just physical dimensions of interaction. Even when people with disabilities attend activities in integrated settings, all too often they experience little or no social interaction with the nondisabled people around them.

One of the primary roles of the support person is to facilitate interactions between the student with a disability and other nondisabled students and teachers. There are a number of strategies that can be used.

- The support person should, where possible, engage him- or herself with nondisabled students, getting to know them, and providing a connecting link between these students and the student with disabilities. As an example, in both volleyball and basketball, the support staff became involved with the entire team, rather than just the person with disabilities.

- The support person should be aware that his or her interactions with the student with disabilities can serve as a model for other students and the activity coordinator as to how to interact with this student. Melanie reported that sometimes "the way Ben acted was a barrier to his involvement with other students...sitting and talking to himself." In cases like this, it is particularly important that the support staff serve as a model, showing others various ways of responding to such behaviors.

- In some instances, the support person might ask a nondisabled student to assist the student with disabilities in a certain activity. This, in turn, can help students get to know one another and promote increased social interaction. Annette, a nondisabled student who sometimes assisted Tasha in gymnastics, said that she got to know Tasha better through gymnastics. At the same time, however, it is important to avoid having students see themselves relate to the student with disabilities in only a helping or teaching (i.e., peer tutor) role.

- Often, interactions occur without any involvement of the support staff. At times, in fact, the presence of the support person may serve as a barrier to interactions, and it may be necessary to consciously back off and let interactions occur independently.

- It may take time for interactions to occur. At first, the support person for Ben for skiing reported that "other kids shy away from Ben." But several weeks later she wrote, "Ben was just

standing making no attempt to ski...A student came up to Ben and tried to get him to move...After a few minutes, Ben did begin to move and Cathy began to ski with him for a little bit. Cathy went on by herself, but as she was coming back, she slowed down and skiied with Ben and me the rest of the way back to the building.."

- Interactions are not all verbal; they may involve sitting with other team members, and cheering together from the sidelines. When Gary first played basketball, he sat next to the support person on the sidelines. After a few weeks, this person recalled, "Gary got along well with his team members today. I think he felt like a player finally and did great. He sat with them when he didn't play...not next to me."

- Some activities, such as team sports or group projects, seem to be more conducive to interactions between students than other activities such as the ski club or computer club. However, even in the activities that are more individualized in nature, it is important to notice and take advantage of what opportunities there are for interaction, revising task objectives accordingly. For example, the cross country skiing itself involved little interaction with other students for Ben, especially since he couldn't keep up with their pace. However, after skiing, the students would gather around the fireplace in the lodge to eat and talk. As previously noted, Ben's initial objectives were revised to allow him time for participation in this social gathering.

Summary: Role of the Support Staff

Over the course of the project, some information was gained as to what are some of the qualities of a good support person. Above all, it was found that it is not necessary to have someone who is trained in the field of developmental disabilities. Instead, it is preferable for support staff to have the following characteristics or strengths:

- Knowledge about and enjoyment of the activity--for example, he or she knows the rules of basketball or enjoys running track.

- Willingness to learn about the individual and how best to provide assistance--for example, in working with Tasha, Colleen observed, "Basically, it's a learning process, figuring out what she does and what I should do."

- Creativity in attracting and assisting other students and teachers to interact with the student with disabilites. This requires an awareness of the dynamics involved in a particular situation and the ability to capitalize on unexpected occurrences.

- Skillful in making a contribution to the activity, rather than just providing assistance to the student with disabilities. This may involve things such as helping to coach a team, or helping to lead a group activity.

Regular Activity Leaders: Perspectives on Including Students with Disabilities

As discussed previously, Chris became acquainted with other staff at Levy in order to facilitate the participation of his students in school activities. The club and activity leaders who had students with disabilities in the groups responded in different ways to these students. This section describes some of their responses, based both on observation of activities and interviews with the activity leaders.

Involvement of Students in Group Activities

Activity leaders accepted the involvement, on different levels, of students with disabilities. For instance, one of the club leaders asked that the student participate only in one aspect of the group activity. However, most were willing to have the students participate in all parts of the activity, in one way or another. For instance, Tasha was on the gymnastics team and Jason was on the track team, but their scores generally were not included competitively as part of the interscholastic meets. However, in Jason's last track meet, the points he earned by completing the race he was entered in contributed to the overall points his team achieved.

Roles of Activity Leaders Vis-a-Vis Students with Disabilities

The activity leaders perceived their roles vis-a-vis the students with disabilities in different ways. There were two predominant views. One was that the support person was the person who should assist the student with disabilities. Along these lines, one activity leader commented, "I was busy with the other students." The other perspective was that the activity leader would treat the student with disabilities the same as all of the other students. For instance, one team coach commented, "He was expected to play just like everyone else."

Noticing Change Over Time

A number of the activity leaders commented on the change they noticed over time in the students with disabilities. They related that, at first, they had some concerns or worries about how things would work out for the group as a whole with the student present, and how the other students would react. One coach reflected, "It worked out a lot better than I thought. When you first start, you kind of worry that what's going to happen. I was just a little worried that some of the kids might react bad...like make fun, but no one did...so it could be luck or it could just be that they were good kids...I don't know what the reason was...but it did work out well." Also, the basketball coach noted Gary's adjustment to playing with the team, and learning to wait his turn: "At the beginning it started off pretty bad the first couple of games...a couple of tantrums and things. After awhile, he really got into it." Finally, the faculty supervisor for the cross-country ski

club noticed changes in Ben over time. "He was doing a lot better this year than last year. I see a change in him. He seems...I don't know...Maybe he knows me now...I hope that Ben's back here another year, and he has another year to work on his skiing and socialization. I really see a change in him."

Benefits to All

Research has documented the benefits of integration for all people, not only those with disabilities (Schelein & Ray, 1988). Voeltz (1980, 1982) found that positive, accepting attitudes toward children with disabilities were greater in children without disabilities who had spent time with their peers with handicaps. At Levy Middle School, several of the activity leaders talked about the benefits to all students when students with severe disabilities participated in extracurricular activities. The basketball coach reflected, "I think it was good for the other kids...'cause a lot of times they just see Chris' kids walking around the halls and they don't really know what's going on too much. I guess they saw that, you know, Gary was almost like every other kid. He didn't do anything crazy or anything. I mean he just played basketball with them." Another coach commented, "Our kids are not used to sharing, and they are not used to helping each other, so when they were put in a situation where--it wasn't that they had to, but they voluntarily decided that this was the good thing to do." Finally, one of the activity leaders reflected on the benefits she received from having a student with disabilities in her group. "It was good for me...We've always had special education students in the school,

but to actually be together...This was new to me. It was rewarding."

Summary: Regular Activity Leaders

In general, the club and activity leaders were very willing to let students with disabilities particiate with support. In a few cases, some trade-offs had to be made in order for the students with disabilities to participate. For instance, a few of the activity leaders placed limitations on the students' participation. Also, among some of the activity leaders, there was the assumption that support for the student with disabilities would come entirely from the support staff member. By making these trade-offs and accepting some conditions set by activity leaders, the students with disabilities at least gained entry into the activities and participated to some extent. It was clear from conversations with activity leaders that many of them learned a lot by involving a particular student in their activity. It is important to have a long term perspective and understand that integration is a process. Not everything will happen the first year or maybe in the first several years. This first year experience was an initial step that will be built on in following years. It would be hoped that, over time, the students' degree of participation would increase and that activity leaders would expand the definition of their role to include that of providing assistance to all students, including those with disabilities. This would not necessarily eliminate the need for support staff;

rather, it would be seen as a way of broadening the base of support for the student with disabilities.

Peers'/Parents' Perspectives on Involving Students with Disabilities

"She was part of the team. Everyone liked her," explained one student who participated on the gymnastics team with Tasha. In voluntary interviews, nondisabled students shared their perceptions about having students with disabilities take part in extracurricular activities. The students interviewed were representative of others who were part of the many different activities. Several had interacted in one way or another with the students with disabilities during the afterschool clubs, meetings, and team practices; others had not. Most of them seemed willing to express their thoughts and experiences.

Many issues emerged from the interviews. They reflect the students' positive and in some cases challenging attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about their interactions and relationships with students who have disabilities. Four of the central themes include: the importance of team membership; opportunities for social interaction and friendships; the significance of performing well; and, acceptance of students with disabilities. Each of these themes will be discussed in this section.

Importance of Team Membership

Many of the students described the role that the students with disabilities played as a member of a particular club or team. One young man who played basketball with Gary talked about Gary's contributions to the intramural team. "I guess he made it fun, and he scored a few points, too.". Another fellow basketball player expressed one of the values of having Gary on his team and how other team members depended on Gary: "He came into the game, and gave another player a chance to rest." Annette, who was on the gymnastics team, discussed Tasha's involvement. "She was good...She participated in everything." Tasha's role as a fellow gymnast and team competitor helped shape this student's positive perception of her capabilities. By having the opportunity to be a part of the team, Tasha was able to demonstrate some of her strengths and skills.

Tasha's daily active involvement also fostered a comraderie that team members often possess, and that students with disabilities do not often have the chance to experience. This was expressed by one student's exclamation that Tasha was, indeed, "part of the team." This spirit of "belonging" affected Tasha too. Her mother described Tasha's enthusiasm about going to gymnastics. "She was very excited! She enjoyed it...In the morning, on the days that there was gymnastics, she would come down and put stuff (gym clothes) in her bag and get ready to go...She had something to look forward to." Besides the fun and enjoyment, Tasha's mother explained some other benefits Tasha derived from being part of the team. "Tasha has so much energy. She was able

to get some of that out during activities and her behavior improved. She had to learn to cope with being in sports and interacting with other kids."

Although Ben, who took part in the cross-country ski club, did not become as closely involved with other club members as Tasha and Mike did, his involvement caused at least one student to reflect on the experience in this way: "All of them (the kids with disabilities) should have this opportunity to be in one, or maybe more, activities."

Opportunities for Social Interaction and Friendship

Being part of a team or club defines a role that is clearly different from those occurring during school hours. Here, students with disabilities can be "good" and contribute in different ways than in the classroom. They can give breaks to tired players or help score a few points. They can begin to leave the label "special" behind and become instead a "basketball player," "gymnast," or "skier." This type of role appeared to have a positive impact on the perceptions of students without disabilities.

Many of the students who were interviewed seemed to enjoy getting to know the students with disabilities. For some, friendships were beginning to develop. These students got to know others with disabilities through working together on club or team activities. For example, Annette worked with Tasha to develop a routine in gymanstics, "I'd do two or three steps at a time and teach her, until she got it. And then we'd go over it a few more

times." Yet, Annette describes this relationship as more than just one of her teaching Tasha. She explained, "I got to know what kind of person she was and what she likes to do." Another student explained her interactions with Ben on the ski trails. "A couple of times, I went by and I started skiing with Ben and Mr. Willis, or if I would see Ben on the trail and Mr. Willis ahead, I would say, "Ben, come on..." If I was skiing that way, or even if I wasn't, I would ski that way and try to encourage him...give him support in his endeavor to learn a new sport." A student who was on the intramural basketball with Gary thought he interacted differently with Gary as a result of playing on a team together. He now thought of Gary as a friend.

Almost every student interviewed mentioned the fact that other members of the clubs or teams reacted in their own way toward the student with disabilities. "Some of them helped him a little; some of them really ignored him," explained Gary's teammate. Another student suggested two reasons why students may ignore those with disabilities. "I'm not sure if they were scared, or also, my friends are here, I can't go talk to this person. What would my friends do? I think it's a lot of peer pressure."

For some students, the experience of getting to know a student with disabilities through a club or team clearly affected their perceptions of and interactions with other students with disabilities at school. The student who got to know Ben during cross-country skiing talked about her perceptions of Ben and other students. "I thought of him as a real person anyways--but I take more notice of him in school and I say "Hi, Ben." If you see one

kid doing it (extracurricular activities), all the other kids who are like him, you start to notice. I say hi to Jason if I see him in the library or something." This student's interactions with Ben on the ski trails heightened her awareness of the presence in school of other students with disabilities. It seems that getting to know Ben helped her to view other students with disabilities as members of the school community too.

Obviously, not everyone became closely involved with the student with a disability who participated in the same activity as themselves. However, in a few short weeks, a number of students were getting to know one another in ways that were different from what they previously had experienced. Some of the students who were interviewed expressed feelings of friendship, others simply got to know the student with a disability a little better. Friendships develop when people do things together; they take time to develop. Membership together on the clubs and teams offered the opportunity to begin this process.

The Importance of Performance

Based on the interviews, a third theme emerged: that of performance as an important factor during competition. Tasha, who took part in gymnastics, also played on the volleyball team. A nondisabled student described Tasha's role on that team. "She was a competitive player!" This same student also described a force which underlies the competitive nature of most students participating in a game of "win or lose"; that is, the significant of performing well. "When we weren't winning by very much and

Tasha was in the game, we all would just hope that she'd hit that ball. It made us nervous!," confided a fellow volleyball player. Yet, she continued, "Sometimes we were worried if you were going to win the game or not...but it wasn't just Tasha, a lot of people didn't know how to play. It made it more challenging." Therefore, despite worry about winning or losing, this student was able to see beyond just Tasha to the whole team as being the factor in winning or losing, and to see Tasha's participation as a positive "challenge" for the team rather than a negative force.

Another student who played basketball with Gary expressed a similar viewpoint. When he was asked what we could do to help Gary have a better time next year, he replied, "He needs to practice his basketball." Another teammate, however, stated a contrasting opinion. "He just played like the rest of us. I guess you could get him more involved. This year he played when we were ahead. I guess push him to do a little more." This student seemed to be offering a suggestion for both enhancing Gary's skills as well as for increasing the expectations of his teammates.

It appears to be important to recognize the effect that either having or not having the skills to perform an activity can have. As with all students, it is important to develop the skills one needs. However, it is interesting to note the ability of some students, even within competitive play, to accept the inclusion of a student with a disability. While the dynamic that takes place in competitive sports should be taken into account, it seems as though one need not wait until skills are fully developed in order to be a part of competition.

Acceptance of Students with Disabilities

Although they attended the same school, most of the nondisabled students had had little direct or sustained contact with the students with disabilities, or other people with disabilities, outside of school. A few students mentioned that hearing Chris Willis give a lecture on disabilities had increased their awareness and acceptance. Educational efforts such as this are important components in the development of accepting attitudes. However, most important is the daily contact between students with and without disabilities across all school environments. It is through this contact that people really are educated." A cross-country ski team member described Ben's presence on the trails: "People knew he was there... I think he made people more aware that the kids with autism do exist...I know that he made me more aware...and I wanted to get to know him." And, as nondisabled students get to know those with disabilities as individuals, stereotypes are dispelled and they begin to relate to the student as they do to every other student, rather than as someone who is "special" or different." As one gymnast explained, "Tasha was a part of the team...It's no different in school...I treat her the same as everyone else."

Conclusion

The meaning of school for children and adolescents is not just about classes and academics; it is also about school friends and

school "spirit." In 1975, P.L. 94-142 opened up the schools for the presence of students with disabilities. Presence is a first step; but it is necessary to go beyond that in order to fully integrate students with disabilities into schools and give them the opportunity to develop friendships and a sense of school spirit. Increasingly, students with disabilities have been leaving the special education classroom to go to "regular" classes, integrated lunch, integrated recess, pep rallys, or school assemblies. Yet, their presence has typically been missing from school clubs, organizations, and teams. This is perhaps due largely to the lack of support needed for students with disabilities to participate.

The project described in this paper to involve students with disabilities in extracurricular activities provides one example about how needed supports were funded, designed, and implemented. It is hoped that by sharing the information about how it worked, we can encourage and assist similar efforts elsewhere. Overall, there are several lessons that were learned:

1. <u>It is important to begin with a set of values and principles</u>. These include (a) the belief that all students, including those with the most severe disabilities, should take part in all aspects of school; and (b) the willingness and commitment to providing whatever supports are necessary for this to happen.

2. <u>Student and family choice is a priority</u>. The interests and preferences of students with disabilities and their families should be taken into account in the selection of extracurricular

activities. Also, the input of others who know the student well, such as their peers, could be helpful.

3. A cooperative effort between school-level and district-level administrators may be required in order to establish supports for students with disabilities for extracurricular activities. We suggest a meeting of all those involved early on to clarify expectations and requirements from both a programmatic and administrative standpoint.

4. Funding from outside the school system can be used to establish supports. For this project, family support funds from the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities were used. The costs of supporting students in the activities described in this paper ranged from $50 to $100 per activity. Human service agencies that have respite and/or recreation programs might be able to assist in obtaining funding or offer support personnel. Some families may have sufficient financial resources of their own to cover expenses. Community service organizations (e.g., Lions Club, Rotary Club) might be willing to make donations if approached. If no funds are available, volunteers could be recruited to provide support.

5. Arranging student participation in extracurricular activities takes a significant effort on the part of the classroom teacher (or someone else who knows the students well). It was important that student participation in activities was staggered; all students

were not involved at the same time. The number of students who can participate at any one time depends upon the degree of support and assistance available to the teacher. Decisions may have to be made about which students should participate in which activities at which times.

6. The teacher's connections to other school faculty and staff play an important role in gaining entry to extracurricular activities for students with severe disabilities. The effort made by teachers to involve their students in classes and other activities during the school day may lay the foundation for participation in afterschool activities. Informal contacts made during discussions in the teachers' lounge, faculty meetings, parties, or chance encounters could also increase another teacher's willingness to include students with disabilities in an activity they are coordinating.

7. The role of the support person should be clearly defined as one of helping facilitate the student's involvement in the activity and interaction with other students and staff. This person does not necessarily need to be trained in special education. More importantly, he or she should have some skill in and interest in the particular extracurricular activity that the student is taking part in, and should look for ways that he or she can contribute to the activity as a whole and become involved with other students in addition to the individual with a disability.

8. Supports provided to the student with disabilities should be both individualized and flexible, tailored to the needs of the particular student. This involves getting to know the student with disabilities. It also includes an awareness of the demands and dynamics of a particular activity.

9. Student participation in competitive activities entails a balance between the needs of the student and those of the team as a whole. The fact that an activity is competitive does not mean that a student with severe disabilities cannot participate. However, it may affect some aspects of that participation (e.g., the length of time the student remains in the game).

10. Participation of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities provides opportunities for nondisabled students and other staff (besides special education staff) to become acquainted with them. In general, the nondisabled students and other staff were used to seeing the special education students around the school; but not usually participating and interacting with them. Participation together in extracurricular activities provided the opportunity for students to get to know one another, and for some relationships to develop which might extend beyond the activity itself or from one year to the next. It also seemed to increase the nondisabled students' awareness of other students with disabilities in the school.

11. Through participation in extracurricular activities, students with disabilities had the opportunity to be a member of a group or team, and to experience a sense of school spirit and camraderie not found through mere presence at the school or in the integrated classroom. Commitment to inclusion of people with disabilities is a significant factor in helping integration come about (Biklen, 1986; Taylor, Biklen, & Knoll, 1987). Significant commitment and effort is required on the part of the special education teacher and the support staff to get students with disabilities involved in all aspects of school life.

The project presented in this paper describes some ways in which the special education techer can promote involvment of students with disabilities in school life beyond the special education classroom. But, overall, the responsibility for integration extends beyond just the special education teacher; what is needed is a commitment and willingness on the part of the entire school community in order to make this integration successful and complete. Students with disabilities should have the same opportunity as all other students in the school to pick and choose among activities and sign up, without any special requests for permission by the special education teacher. Families of students with disabilities should be encouraged to assist their son or daughter in choosing an activity. If this student needs assistance to participate, the family might choose to provide someone themselves, or they might ask either the special education teacher or the activity leader to help plan and arrange for support.

If an atmosphere of willingness and commitment is nurtured within the school, the result will be the inclusion of students with severe disabilities, not only as partial participants in some aspects of school life, but as full participants and members of the school community.

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